

CEREBUS GOING HOME

16

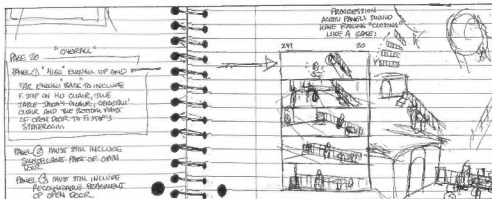
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GOING HOME

BOOK ONE

Sudden Moves
(Cerebus 232 to
239)

BOOK TWO

Fall and the
River
(Cerebus 240 to
250)

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CHAPTER III

THE BLOKE EN ROUTE

It is noon of the next day. The doors and portholes of both staterooms have been opened wide to allow stifling inner atmospheres—vainly—to solicit relief from fresh, fragile gusts and thin breezes wafting up from the southeast. Though her outward demeanour allows of no evidence or sign that GINEVRA has reached a decision, JAY ANTHONY DIVER registers the unnatural heat of the autumn day as a portent that her thoughts—like his own—are now firmly fixed upon the Sea of the South...and her future island home there.

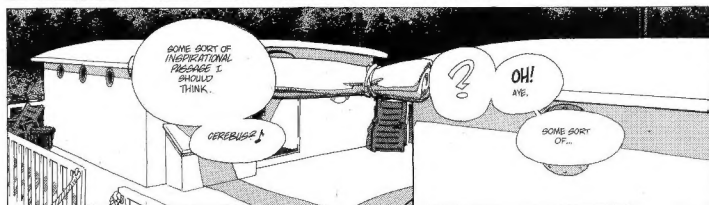
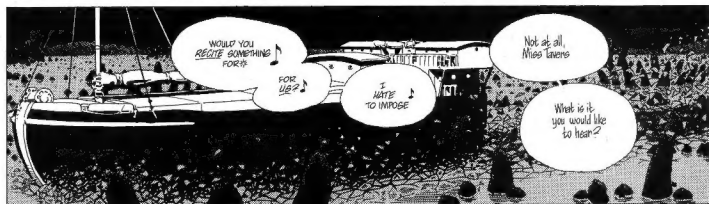
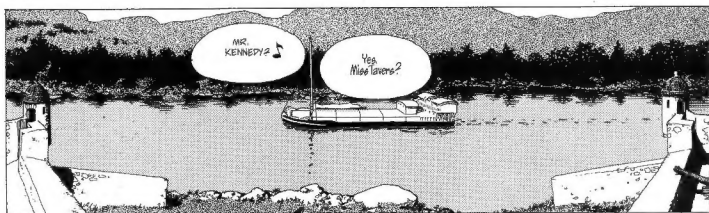
Before him, his notebook's current page sprawls with insular nouns, sentence fragments, and disjointed phrases, signpost impressions which document JAY ANTHONY DIVER'S day—a day which is growing, moment by moment, more dream-like and more unearthly. Attended by a half-dozen asterisks and underscored twice—vehemently!—on the page is: "Red ice to horizon" and "Pieces float up." He is unable to say which is the more peculiar: the scene before his mind's eye—waxing and then waning in clarity—of pink and crimson, fragments and splinters of ice (silently) floating up and away from the barge's forward impact...

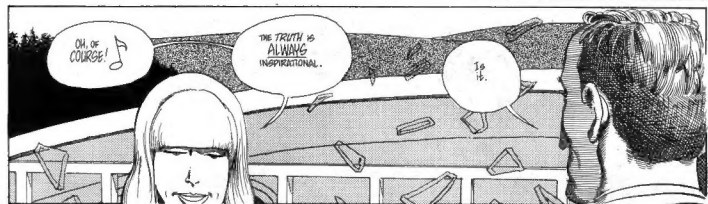
...or the fractured apparitions themselves, which seem to him both disconcertingly unnatural and—at one and the same time — reassuringly familiar.

The Mothers are nowhere to be seen so that—unprecedentedly—the table is still strewn with the used glassware, plates, cutlery, and napkins of the noon meal. In his exceptional state of mind, it seems to JAY ANTHONY DIVER that all of these—the tabletop debris, the jumble of words on the page before him, even GINEVRA and JOZAN themselves (neither of whom have moved for some period of time)—share in a state of existence quite separate from his own. The only discernible movements on the rearmost deck are those of his pencil and his hand as he writes: “Dishes, words, GINEVRA, JOZAN. Chaotic, random, but fixed configuration.” As if in reply, a carmine-coloured ice splinter pinwheels, lazily, through the inner radius of JAY ANTHONY DIVER’S peripheral vision, so that he feels—almost—as if he might reach out and catch it.

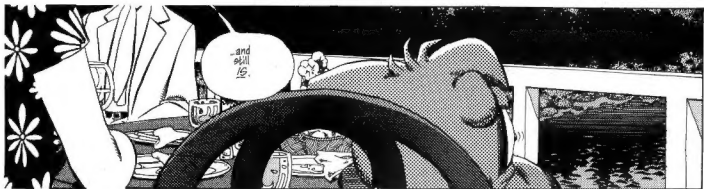
He senses rather than sees GINEVRA stirring uneasily in her chair, her eyes, like JOZAN’S, still fixed upon the crumbling yellow walls of some antiquitous Lower Feldan town passing—as if in review—before them. Somehow, JAY ANTHONY DIVER is possessed of the knowledge that—despite her inward resolve to not interrupt his writing—in a moment she will do just that. “Yes, Miss Tavers?” Somehow, JAY ANTHONY DIVER is possessed of the knowledge that her interruption will take the form of a request. “Not at all, Miss Tavers. What is it you would like to hear?” Somehow, JAY ANTHONY DIVER is possessed of the knowledge, even as he begins, mentally, to refine the structure...“Inspirational”...and the word-rhythms...“Inspirational”...of the third chapter of the second book of his as-yet-unnamed novel...

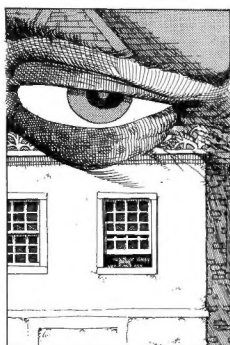
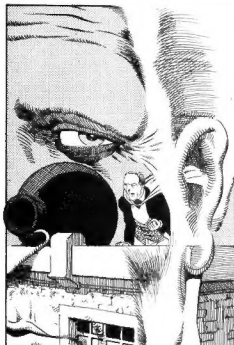
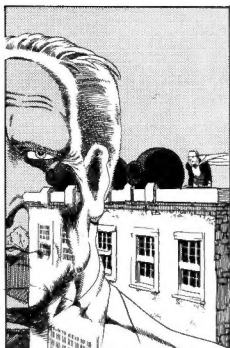
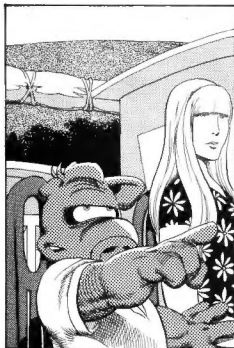
Somehow, JAY ANTHONY DIVER is possessed of the knowledge that the content of the chapter is...in a very real sense... predetermined.

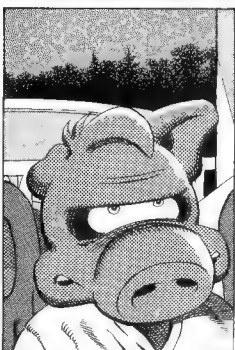
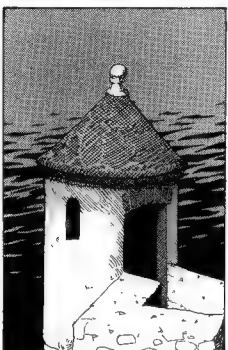
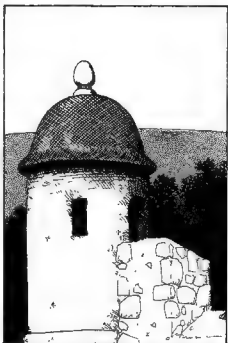
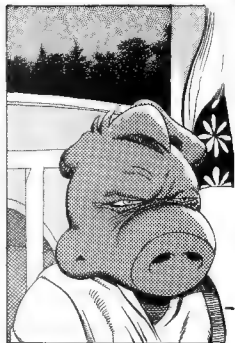
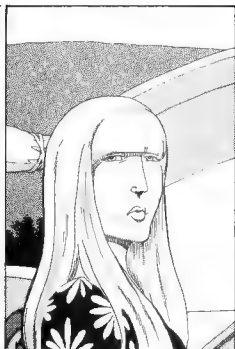
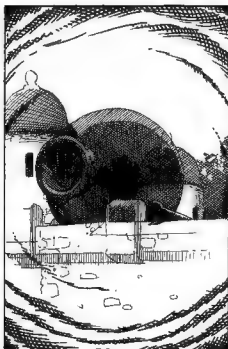


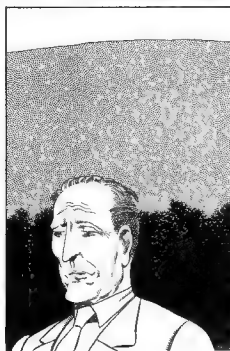
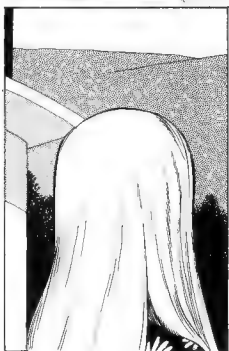
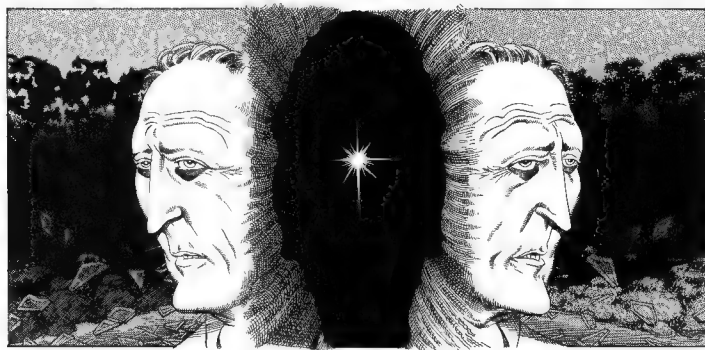
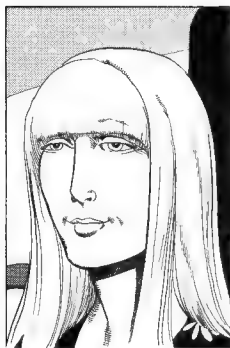
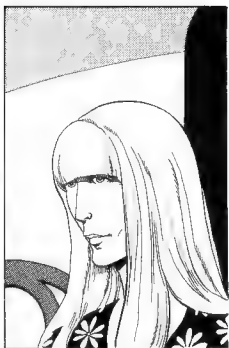












JOZAN: (*characteristically oblivious to the conversational crescendo which is imminent*) Ginevra, look. See that turret over there?

(*With that half-heartedly agreeable—and wholly feigned—interest which is the stock in trade of any dutiful spouse, GINEVRA does as she is bidden. Simultaneous with the shift in her attentions, the “Red ice to horizon” fades from view before the mind’s eye of JAY ANTHONY DIVER and is supplanted by a mountainside courtyard encircled by small buildings. Atop one of these—alongside three large, black, metal spheres—stands the figure of a man, red-faced and apoplectic with rage. The man—whom JAY ANTHONY DIVER recognizes as himself—shouts hysterically at someone in the building opposite his own, someone who is:*)

JOZAN: Jozan killed a guy over there once.

(*No sooner is this said than an excruciating, hammer-blow pain strikes JAY ANTHONY DIVER below his left breast, wrenching his torso forward. Paralyzed and in agony, he is unable to draw a single breath, is unable to attract GINEVRA or JOZAN’S attention by either word or sound, and—his mouth working silently, convulsively—is thus unable, for their benefit, to voice the obvious distinction between the large metal spheres on the rooftop and the flared metal cylinder peeking over a battlement which blurs before him. Blackness swirls in from the periphery of his vision, until, as if from a great distance, he hears:*)

GINEVRA: No.

(*So off-handedly and yet so definitively is this said that it seems to escape JOZAN’S notice—entirely—that GINEVRA had not been with him on the occasion in*

question. Likewise does it escape JAY ANTHONY DIVER'S notice—until he later transcribes his notes on this strange interlude—that he, DIVER, had not been there either and so has no way of knowing about GINEVRA'S OWN absence. Somehow, however, know it he does.

After what seems like an eternity of torment, he hears JOZAN'S grudging reply:)

JOZAN: Nay. Nay, you're right.

(And with that, the crippling pains and crushing vise-like pressures in JAY ANTHONY DIVER'S chest vanish as quickly as they had appeared. Astonished, he...gratefully...refills his lungs with sweet, fresh air. GINEVRA turns back towards him—blithely ignorant of the ordeal he has just endured—and arches a single eyebrow, as if to say, "So much for 'killing guys.' Go on, Mr. Diver." JAY ANTHONY DIVER, vainly endeavouring to reclaim the thread of their conversation finds himself, abruptly—like some seasoned thespian sleepwalking through a role as familiar to him as the back of his own hand — saying aloud:)

JAY ANTHONY DIVER: A portrait painter who does landscapes.

(In some fashion—inexplicable even in considered retrospect—JAY ANTHONY DIVER awakens to the fact that he has arrived at some midpoint, some core, some center...of, at, or within...the otherworldly state in which he finds himself. And so—symmetrically — he adds:)

Or a landscape painter who does portraits.

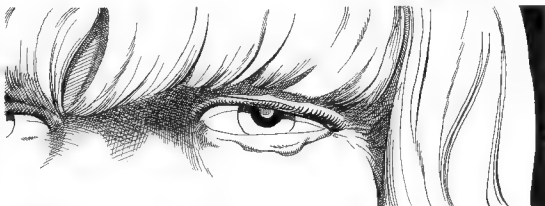
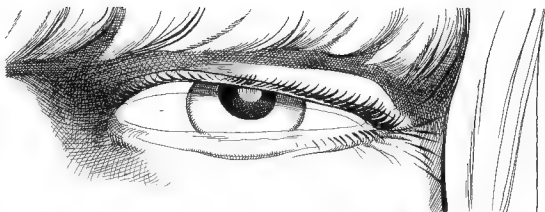
GINEVRA: *(genuinely intrigued)* And what was it that he wrote, Mr. Diver?

(And, from memory, JAY ANTHONY DIVER begins to recite:)

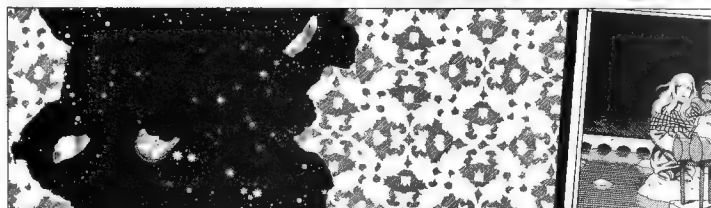
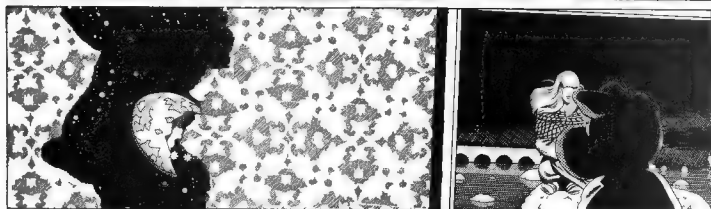
In the weeks consumed by the completion of the painting no further word regarding payment had passed between them. At last, the painter removed the engraving from its resting place on the wallpaper (of his own design) and replaced it with the finished work.

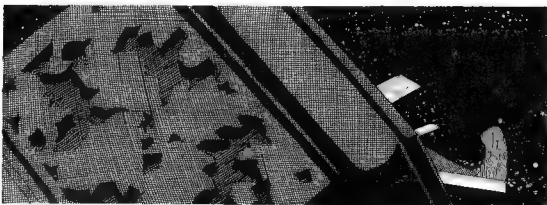
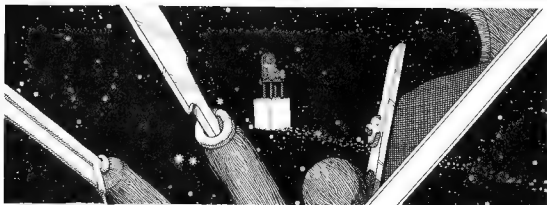
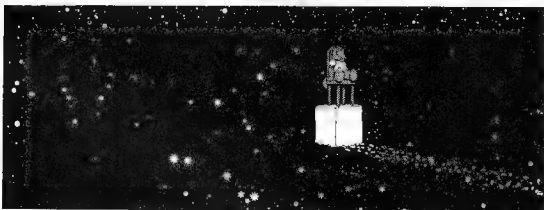
They sat, for the most part, in silent and separate reverie, conversing only sporadically and then lapsing into silence once more. They parted company that night, patron and artist, with a formality that was not without human warmth. They knew they would never see each other again.

A package arrived at his studio the next day which contained a small chest of solid gold, intricately carved and inlaid with precious stones. Within the box, resting on the finest purple velvet, was an eggshell

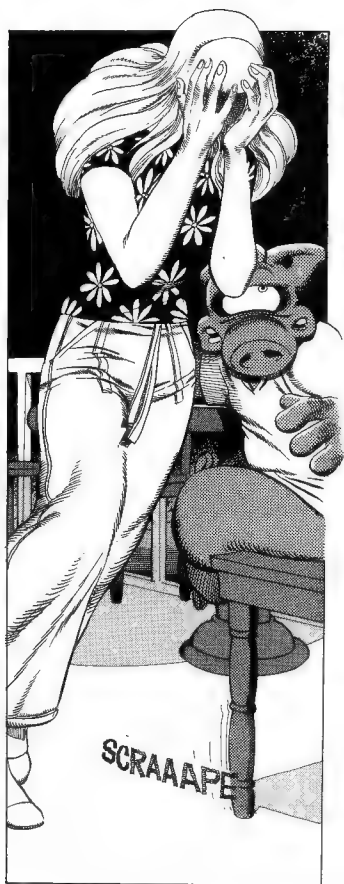




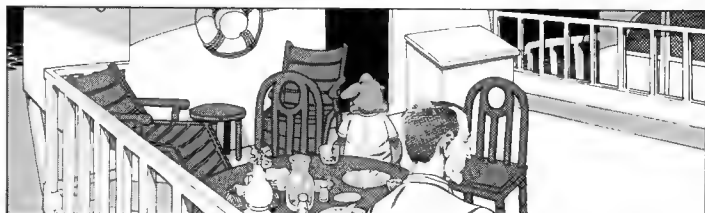
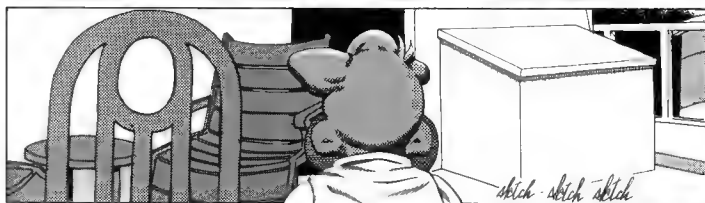


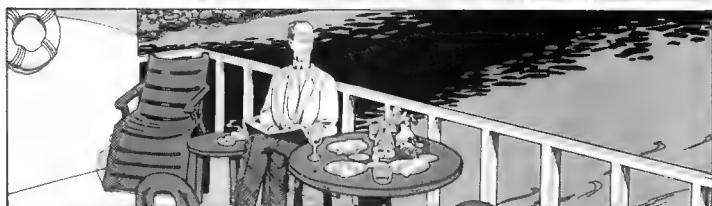
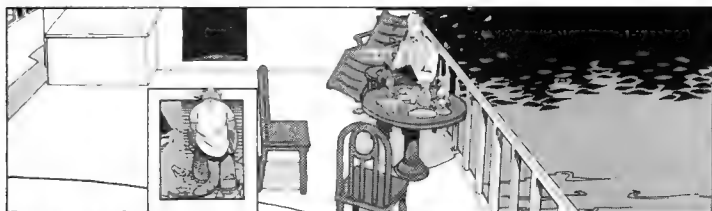


adorned with a pastel flourish, painstakingly rendered in imitation of the wallpaper design which framed his picture, unmistakably rendered in an amateur's hand. The eggshell had been broken, carefully, into two pieces. Each night, after completing his work, he would sit contemplating the box and the eggshell halves within. He purchased some fine wood and an inexpensive set of small saws and chisels and planes. After several weeks, his hands scarred and his nails splintered, he had constructed a small, lop-sided ebony box whose lid did not fit properly. On its front was carved a relief of that same wallpaper pattern, crude but recognizable. He lined the box with one of his best silk handkerchiefs: placed one half of the eggshell within it, and had it sent, by courier, to her residence.









CHASING SCOTT

continued from last issue

So she would've been 24, 25, and 26 in those years.

The last notation about Lois Moran in Mary Jo Tate's *F. Scott Fitzgerald A to Z* states that she married aviation executive Clarence M. Young in 1935.

Clarence M. Young was seven years older than F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Of course, to me, the mistaken notion that Scott Fitzgerald laboured under was that time can be made to stand still either for oneself or for others. There are two good studio portraits of Zelda, taken in 1918 and 1919, where she is, quite simply, stunningly beautiful. By the time they married in 1920, she was "handsome"—as Gore Vidal described her, with a homosexualist's aptitude for *le mot juste* and "damning with faint praise." Occasionally thereafter Zelda could be described as pretty (I'm thinking of a shot of her with the baby Scottie, taken in Minnesota). It would come as no great shock for me to find out that Lois Moran experienced the same "erosion" and that Scott Fitzgerald was as disappointed in the transformation of the 18-year-old Lois Moran into the 25-year-old Lois Moran as he had been in the transformation of 18-year-old Zelda Sayre into 27-year-old Zelda Fitzgerald.

Deplore it if you want—I think it is as natural as sunrise and sunset.

Page 289 – "She carried space around with her..." The original in Fitzgerald's *Notebooks* began: "Emily, who was twenty-five..." The age jumped out at me, so I thought I would include it.

Page 291 – "The topic is too sensitive, standing here pissing razor blades." This was an actual piece of graffiti which was barely visible in the caulking between two tiles in the men's room in Peter's Place (the bar that served as the model for the bar in *Guys and Rick's Story*), directly over one of the urinals.

I needed something sort of "manly" for Cerebus and F. Stop to discuss here, so this is what I picked—having filed it away for use during *Guys* and never having had the chance to use it.

Pages 294-295 – I basically role-played F. Stop Kennedy, writer. "Here's a piece of graffiti—what sort of a story would you make out of it?" I had a fair-sized *Saturday Evening Post* story sketched out in my head before I gave a sharp tug on the leash. "Whoa—just a couple of ideas, thanks. They have to talk about other things, too."

Page 296 – This is one of mine which I usually reserve for "men only" company. Males who say, "I have to pee" usually look as if they "pee"—if not "tinkle." They usu-

ally look as if they'd get their feelings hurt and start to cry if you said, "Men piss. Women pee."

I don't go out much anymore.

Page 305 – That peculiar "no harm, no foul" approach that women take to dispersing sensitive information.

"Why are you telling me all this?"

Well, Jaka knows why the Cirinist is telling her "all this." But the Cirinist can say, "I'm sure I don't know. Forgive me, Jaka, I can be so silly sometimes," and, ipso facto, it's as if she hadn't said anything. Same as when a woman says, "You didn't hear it from me" or "Forget I said anything."

Scary gender, man.

Page 307 – It came time to start work on issue 247 of *Cerebus* (*Going Home*, pages 307-326), and a little voice in my head insisted that I should go to the library and check *The Beautiful and Damned* again. Again? I tend not to disbelieve that little voice in my head, but on this occasion I was doubtful. I had already read the book twice in its entirety and most of the way through a third time. Surely there was nothing left to extract from it. "Don't call me Shirley," I said to myself (Really. A now-tired old joke from — the first *Naked Gun* film?—but the little voice in my head tends to imitate whichever personality I'm working with at the moment. My F. Scott Fitzgerald voice starts every other sentence with "Surely," so...). So, off to the library I go. Since the last section of "Fall and the River" to be directly modelled on *The Beautiful and Damned* was the "Maury Noble monologue" parody, I thought I'd check to see what followed the monologue in the original book.

"The Broken Lute."

I was dumfounded.

"The Broken Lute" follows directly after the Maury Noble monologue? And the monologue is the end of the "Symposium" chapter?! I sat there, staring at the two pages across from each other—grateful for whatever hidden instinct of mine had filed away that little nugget of information—and had then called it to the attention of my conscious mind that morning. I had included the opening page of "The Broken Lute" in my initial batch of photocopies, based entirely on the distinctive "look" of the page—with no idea of where it might (or even if it might) fit into the work in progress. I returned to the studio, thinking about the two parody fragments hovering in thin air on page 269 now on the wall of Ger's studio. I grafted onto them two of the "The Broken Lute" puns I had jotted down at the library (bypassing, I think wisely, "The Low Cum Brute," "The Blow Kin Root," "The Below Can Root," and other unsavoury choices), admiring the neatness with which the two pieces now fit the context of the story.

(I belabour the point because it seems to me a good example of one of those occasions familiar to most writers—when some outside agency or other seems to have “taken the wheel” temporarily. “Where do you get your ideas?” Well, where *did* I get the idea to use the opening page of “The Broken Lute” in the way that I did? It came as a nearly complete surprise. Enough of a surprise that it would seem to me dishonest either to take credit or blame for it.

I *still* can’t really believe the juxtaposition. When it came time to write these notes, a couple of months after finishing that section, I had to go back and recheck what I already knew to be true. Surely “The Broken Lute” doesn’t start *immediately* after the monologue. There’s more to the “Symposium” chapter. No. There it was in black and white. And don’t call me Shirley.)

Working with that page over the course of several days, I developed a certain curiosity about it. Whose idea was the italic typeface? Whose idea was the “anti-indenting”—the first line of each paragraph starting a few characters ahead of the rest of the paragraph? Whose idea was it to have the names of the characters all in non-italic capitals, with the initial letter of the name larger than the subsequent letters? Was Fitzgerald *designing* as well as *writing* his pages? If so, he was something of a pioneer in doing so.

“The Broken Lute” moves from its initial quartet of paragraphs into theatrical script format for the ensuing fourteen or so pages.

[A short digression: After I mentioned that, so far as I knew, Fitzgerald pioneered the use of the theatrical script format in novels, I received a letter from a Cerebus fan telling me that James Joyce had done so in *Ulysses*. According to Tate’s *F. Scott Fitzgerald A to Z*, Joyce’s *Ulysses* was published around the same time as *The Beautiful and Damned*, 1922. Edmund Wilson wrote to Fitzgerald on 26 May asking if he had read *Ulysses* “Because if you haven’t, the resemblance between the drunken-visions scene in it and your scene in the White House (in the play *The Vegetable*, which Fitzgerald was writing after he completed *The Beautiful and Damned*) must take its place as one of the great coincidences in literature.” Fitzgerald had *not* read *Ulysses*, which was banned in the U.S. at the time, and asked how he might obtain a copy. Assuming the dates are correct, Fitzgerald and Joyce were pioneering the theatrical script motif *simultaneously*—completely unaware that the other was doing so. (Strange planet, this writing business.)]

Page 313 – I decided to reprise the technique I had already developed on pages 198-199 of using “silent” comics pages leading into a text piece. Part of my ongoing experiment to incorporate text pieces into a comic-book story so that the reader actually *reads* them instead of skipping over them. I’m not pointing fingers here, by the way. I have the same experience when I’m reading a comic-book story and hit a page of text: “Oh, shit. Do I really have to read all THIS?” Which is a very strange reaction from someone who breezed through *War and*

Peace in less than a week. Yes, Dave, you have to read *all one page of it*. It seems to me a structural difference between reading prose and reading a comic book. In the former case, one expects to be on a page for a period of time, sweeping one’s eyes across the page in a regular rhythm and pattern—“broom-like.” Reading a comic-book story is more like bouncing a basketball with your eyes or following a trail of bread crumbs. The eyes bounce from caption to balloon to balloon to caption like a basketball or as if the eyes were snatching up bread crumbs in quick succession. The part of the brain that derives satisfaction from broom-like sweepings, I decided, is a very different part of the brain from the part that enjoys bouncing a basketball or snatching up bread crumbs. The latter analogy is probably more apt. The most satisfying part of reading a comic book is “not knowing where you’re going”—the *surprise* bread crumbs, the story “payoffs.” It’s probably impossible to structure comic-book pages and text together in such a way that broom-like sweepings and snatching bread crumbs exist in happy harmony—at least in the first reading. Once the “treasure hunt” is over, the part of the brain that prefers snatching bread crumbs to broom-like sweepings is not as eager to be “on its way” (I don’t want to sweep! I have bread crumbs to snatch!); the text pieces are perceived to be more a part of the story and not so much “in the way.” Following three silent comic-book pages with two pages of text might just “work”—the idea being that the text explains to the reader what those “strange bread crumbs” he or she just “ate” were all about. Different readers have different reading biases as well. Some are “sweep and snatch” (reading all the text pieces and letters pages and then reading the comic-book stuff), and others are “snatch and sweep” (reading the comic-book pages first and then the text pieces and letters pages, etc.). Much of the comic-book audience could be described as “snatch purists”—they just plain don’t like any comic book which has *any* text in it larger than a caption. With very good reason, they feel that hanging is too good for that Dave Sim character.

Page 316 – Once again, it seemed as if I were being moved along by the same kind of predestination which I was documenting. Before my trip to the library, I had been rolling ideas around in my head as to how I would communicate the subtle nuances of psychic barriers breaking down between Cerebus and F. Stop Kennedy and a tenuous link between Cerebus, F. Stop, and Jaka being forged (however temporarily).

From my initial notes for “Fall and the River”:

He (*F. Stop Kennedy*) mentions M. Zulli by name which fractures everything in the vicinity—Cerebus flashing back to *Minds*, Jaka to the moment, and the three (in overlapping conversation) getting to the egg and the hand-crafted box. Jaka cries.

The biggest difficulty was how to convey the explosive subjective and objective “otherworldliness” of the

sequence, even in as versatile a medium as the comic book. As soon as I saw the re-emergence of the "theatrical script" format in "The Broken Lute"—structurally at least—all of my problems were solved. The subjective impact of the sequence could be carried, first, by "Jay Anthony Diver's" voice-over narration and then by "stage directions" in the theatrical script format. It required modifying the "overlapping conversation" I had originally intended—making the "psychic violence" more centripetal: Jaka and Cerebus "orbiting" F. Stop Kennedy in a way. In a way F. Stop and Cerebus "orbiting" Jaka, rather than the three of them playing psychic "ring around the rosey" at the height of the sequence, as I originally (and vaguely) pictured it. Once again, the sheer happenstance of how it was all coming together made me wonder if I wasn't subject to the centripetal force I figured I was just, you know, making up.

I had already decided to experiment with the "camera movement" in the story. Which leads to another digression:

DIALOGUE: DAVE AND GER

DAVE: It will probably seem strange to the people reading this—how unaware we are of what the other guy is doing. I'm only vaguely aware of the history of your using the computer to help with the backgrounds. So I thought that, instead of just getting you to insert megabytes and RAM numbers and program names in this section (and creating the false impression that I have the faintest idea what I'm talking about), I thought we could use a dialogue format. So what is the history of you using the computer to help with the backgrounds?

GER: I got the 3D Home Architect software about five years ago. We first used it for the cover of the *Gnys* trade paperback, remember? I redid the floor plan onto the computer, printed out a few camera angles, and you picked one. I laid out and pencilled the backgrounds initially, and then you pencilled and inked the characters. Probably the only time that the background was done first. Since then I've entered into the computer the two staterooms and the aft deck of the barge.

DAVE: Of course now that you mention it I remember. It was one of those things I just don't retain since I had my own problems to solve. When you started, I was a little worried because computers just seem to devour time. Investing five hours on the "front end" to save fifteen minutes on the "back end." But we've always had the clear division of labour. As long as we each get our work done in time to keep the book on schedule, it's up to each of us where we invest our time. Do you still use the same software? I know you upgraded the computer at some point because it was taking too long to print out the images.

GER: We upgraded to a new computer because the floppy drive died in the obsolete piece-of-shit 486, which means nothing to you, I know. I hadn't been able to use the software much for *Rick's Story*, because it took forever, sitting staring at an hourglass icon, waiting for the

3D images to come up. So I wasn't getting the "back-end" payoff for the time I spent. The new machine has the megahertz and RAM and disk space necessary to support the same software properly. Now we get virtually instantaneous 3D images on the screen and can adjust the camera position more readily. Though now we need a faster printer.

DAVE: I guess that's what happens when you name a piece of computer equipment after the "morning-after" pill. It's bound to be something of an abortion. I've just been writing the piece that leads into this one (over yonder at the typewriter which *doesn't* have a TV on it), and I've gotten to the part about the centripetal force—the vortex quality—I wanted in this part of the story. It seemed to me that the best way to get that idea across was with an issue-long 360-degree "camera" rotation around the three characters. I've started sequences like that before, but then I get bored pencilling them and I throw in a close-up or something. But this time I really wanted to stick with it, and it seemed to me that the best way to make *sure* that I stuck with it was to start with the backgrounds and fit the characters in. I started with page 20—roughing in the five tiers of panels, with the back railing on the barge "swinging shut" like a long narrow gate. Maybe 30 to 40 degrees of a circle. I remember showing you that sketch in my notebook. At 30 to 40 degrees of a circle per page, obviously the camera was going to go around the circle a few times.

So when are we getting the new printer?

GER: When something in this obsolete piece-of-shit printer breaks. Yeah, I remember looking at the sketches and thinking that I'm going to have to take quite a different approach here. Normally, when I start on a page, the characters are inked in the panel and I figure out, from their relative size and position, what you'd see behind them. But here we were starting on the *last* panel of the *last* page, working our way *backward* through the camera rotation, dividing 360 degrees into fives for the panels per page, and dividing the camera height into equal steps throughout the "crane shot." From the furniture library of the program, I had floor lamps modified in height to represent all the characters and placed them on their carefully positioned chairs. We'd move the camera a little this way, a little that way, raise the camera, lower the camera. We had our little scaled-down, panel-sized window to place over the screen for framing the shot before printing it out, and did it all without anyone throwing a single punch. Someday no comics will be made this way.

DAVE: It was interesting to me because the last page worked okay. It was just a matter of moving the camera position so that the back railing looked as if it were "swinging shut." But then I tried roughing in the characters on page 19 and getting you to move the camera position so that it matched the angle I had roughed in. I remember wasting a good twenty minutes on that part until I realized the problem—the backgrounds had to come first. And then solving the basic math problem. Place the camera—or rather the "camera," virtual reality

being what it is—for panel 1 and panel 5 on the page: a height of sixteen feet and a height of six feet, say, and then divide the height difference into equal parts for panels 2, 3, and 4. And then dividing the “arc” between 1 and 5 into three equidistant positions as well. There was some weird “compression/distortion” effect which obtained that you explained and then I promptly forgot. Something that made the composition look accurate on the screen but distorted when the images were printed out, that had to do with the “camera” being too close or using the “zoom lens.” What was up with that again?

GER: 3D Home Architect is a fairly simple program, I think, as far as the rules for two-point perspective are concerned. If the “camera” is placed too close to an object and at an oblique angle, you get one of the two vanishing points *within* the frame of the drawing. This results in a “fish-eye lens” effect. Optically, the outcome is the curved, distorted image you’re familiar with. The program don’t do curves so good. You end up with a straight-line interpretation of a wide-angle shot. Very distorted, very unconvincing. What we ended up doing is moving the “camera” well back from the subject, giving us more of a “telephoto lens” effect. Then with the program’s zoom-in tool, we could frame the shot. The zoom-in would enlarge a defined area of the drawing and not alter the perspective.

DAVE: I see. Sort of.

It was interesting once I had the five printouts of the backgrounds for page twenty, and I photocopied them and trimmed them to size and taped them into place on the page. I realized that I could move the camera further—that is, “move” the “camera” “further” by enlarging the last and second-to-last panel backgrounds on the photocopier. So I did that and then realized that I could enlarge them still further and really have a very dramatic “medium shot to close-up” camera movement from panel 1 to panel 5. I was going to do it, and then I realized that it had taken about two hours just to get to that point and I hadn’t *drawn* anything yet. The blueprint for *your* part was in place, but so far all I had was a tall lamp, which didn’t look much like F. Stop Kennedy, and a short lamp that didn’t really resemble Cerebus.

I filed it away in my mind, anyway, in case there’s a sequence up ahead that would benefit from really dramatic camera movements like that.

Some day *no* comics will be done this way.

Either that or it’ll be two other guys who need to have their heads examined.

Page 318 – And then there are things that I have no problem at all taking credit and/or blame for. Way back during *Minds* (pages 140-144), in addition to demonstrating to Cerebus how little he knew about Jaka, I also wanted to lay the groundwork for the wedge I intended driving between them when Jaka came back and the two of them were headed for Sand Hills Creek. I intended that wedge to be the centrality of art in Jaka’s life—her love of art in general, quite apart from her *own* art, dancing. Gotcha.

Page 327 – I wasn’t so much running out of gas on “Fall and the River” as I was running out of ideas of how to maintain the feverish level of interest in the story that I had been maintaining through issue 247. F. Scott Fitzgerald had been as close to a constant companion in my life as I had had since Oscar Wilde back in the *Jaka’s Story* and *Melmoth* days. I only dreamt about him once: I was showing him the three parody title variations on “The Broken Lute”. He was diffidently noncommittal, which gave the “encounter” an eerie verisimilitude.

On those occasions when I allowed myself to read the story in progress, I was pretty satisfied with the way it was coming together—coloured with hues of disbelief that so many parts of it were actually done. I would never again have to read Maury Noble’s monologue, as an example. If the story was not exactly “big box office” in the comic-book world (mired as the medium is in the excesses of Sigourney Weaver/Demi Moore-style “Chick with a Big Gun” feminism when it isn’t a snake-devouring-its-own-tail, sentimentally adhering to its parents’—and now *grandparents’*—“Heroes in Tights” nostalgia), I found that to be more help than hindrance. The fact that there was no reaction to “Fall and the River,” either publicly or privately, meant that I had only my own (and Gerhard, *his* own) ridiculously...thorough...standards to deal with, page by page, panel by panel.

I needed some way to “psych” myself for the final push through to the conclusion of the 220-page segment; on the one hand to assure myself that it really all “fit” comfortably into the confines allotted to it (there was no “wiggle” room—if “Fall and the River” “spilled over,” it would be at the expense of the third book, which was filling up rapidly), and on the other to buy myself the research time needed for book three of *Going Home* (which was beginning in a little over six months)—something I knew I would be unable to begin while I was still crossing the t’s and dotting the i’s on “Fall and the River.” As it happened, Ger was going on vacation for two weeks, so I was looking forward to Total Isolation (as opposed to my usual “total” or total isolation) to ...what? I didn’t know. Something. I would do...something.

So I came into work on the Monday, finished my coffee, orange juice, and donut, and thought, well, here it is. Total Isolation. So what *am* I going to do?

I decided I wanted to read the Pat Hobby stories. This surprised me. If I had given myself some clue that morning that that was what I wanted to do, I could’ve brought my library card with me and checked the book out (the Kitchener Library has *two* copies of the first printing of *The Pat Hobby Stories*—Charles Scribners & Sons, 1962—the lucky sods). Oh, well, I’ll just read it *at* the library, I thought.

So that’s what I did.

Fitzgerald’s biographers always take great pains to assert that Pat Hobby was not an autobiographical version of Fitzgerald himself. This seems more than a little disingenuous to me. At the time that Fitzgerald created

the "down on his luck" Hollywood scenarist who "used to be a good man for structure" and who was always trying to finagle "three weeks at three-fifty" or "two weeks at four hundred" rewriting other people's scripts, Fitzgerald himself had descended from the lofty heights of \$1,250 a week (his salary at MGM when his contract was not renewed) to the level of having to get freelance work where he could find it. There are differences, of course. Pat Hobby had completely exhausted his writing talents, and most of his "script doctoring" amounted to substituting "crimson" for "red" and the like (in one of my favourites, "Boil Some Water—Lots of It," Pat had been assigned to "punch up" a medical script, and the story's title was the only line he had come up with after several days "work"). Fitzgerald was at least "flogging" his own work (however unsuccessfully)—trying to get adaptations of his Basil Duke Lee stories and "Babylon Revisited" into development. And if writing was not coming as easily to him as it had in his twenties, he still had considerable literary resources to draw on. He had begun work on *The Love of the Last Tycoon* (as Prof. Brucoli would have it) or *The Last Tycoon* (as Edmund Wilson and posterity would have it). But, thematically speaking, a writer who was once paid \$4,000 for his short stories by *The Saturday Evening Post* and was now earning the princely sum of \$150 per for the seventeen Pat Hobby stories (published in consecutive issues of *Esquire* from January of 1940 to May of 1941) can scarcely be said to have manufactured a "down on his luck" writer out of whole cloth.

Arnold Gingrich's introduction is a model of its kind, informative, affectionate, and engaging. Fitzgerald's *Esquire* editor encapsulates their working relationship while, in my view, modestly understating his own contribution to shoring up a writer on whom the world had turned its back. From Mary Jo Tate's *F. Scott Fitzgerald A to Z*:

He praised Fitzgerald's writing in a 1934 letter: "Regarding the written word like a musical instrument, you are the supreme virtuoso—nobody can draw a purer finer note from the string of an English sentence." (*Correspondence*, p.397)

Perhaps more significant—widely more significant:

When Fitzgerald asked for advances in 1935, Gingrich responded that he could not forward money without something to show the accountants and "suggested that he put down anything that came into his head, as automatic writing in the Gertrude Stein manner, or that, if even that were beyond his powers of concentration, he simply copy out the same couple of sentences over and over, often enough to fill eight or ten pages, if only to say 'I can't write stories about young love for *The Saturday Evening Post*.'" (*The Armchair Esquire* [New York: Putnam, 1958], p.93)

The result, of course, was "The Crack-Up," "Pasting It Together," and "Handle With Care," Fitzgerald's trio of pieces for *Esquire* about his nervous collapse. It seems clear to me that without Gingrich's rock-bottom assurances that *anything* Fitzgerald would choose to write would be acceptable, he might never have written anything after 1935 except for largely worthless Hollywood script collaborations. As confirmation that it was only Gingrich's rock-bottom assurances that allowed Fitzgerald to attempt further writing, I would offer the fact that Fitzgerald himself always described the trio of pieces as "sketches," not articles, thus acknowledging the fact that they represented, in form as well as content, the rock bottom of what Fitzgerald would consider writing.

As Gingrich says in his introduction, quoting from *Esquire*'s obituary at the time of Fitzgerald's death in December 1940 (two thirds of the way through the sequence of stories), the Pat Hobby stories were Fitzgerald's "last word from his last home, for much of what he felt about Hollywood and about himself permeated these stories."

Having finished the introduction, I devoured the seventeen stories in a little over two hours. I had to stop several times when my silent laughter threatened to become Unsilent (I'm part of that clearly vanishing breed that believes libraries should be, you know, quiet for the most part). Particularly bad for keeping my laughter silent was "On the Trail of Pat Hobby" where the studio offers a reward of \$50 to whoever can come up with the name of a movie about tourist cabins. Falling-down drunk, Pat grouches that all the good titles have already been taken and offers *It Happened One Morning*. He finally wins the prize accidentally with...*Grand Motel*.

I guess you had to be there.

How about this from "Boil Some Water—Lots of It":

The word boil brought a quick glad thought of the commissary. A reverent thought too—for an old-timer like Pat, what people you sat with at lunch was more important in getting along than what you dictated in your office. This was no art, as he often said—this was an industry.

"This is no art," he remarked to Max Leam who was leisurely drinking at a corridor water cooler. "This is an industry."

Max had flung him this timely bone of three weeks at three-fifty.

"Say look, Pat! Have you got anything down on paper yet?"

"Say, I've got some stuff already that'll make 'em—" He then named a familiar biological function with the somewhat startling assurance that it would take place in the theatre.

continued next issue

